

Why do we like art? Psychological explanations

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Art is universal; all cultures know of its production and consumption, children appreciate it, and it is found even under very miserable circumstances. Psychological approaches to understanding art appreciation focus on cognitive and emotional processes that occur during aesthetic experiences. Consequently, they aim to identify which processes are positive and rewarding. Candidates for such processes are either intrinsically positive, as for example in the cognitive fluency explanation by Leder (2002), or they are closely related to biologically founded principles, such as beauty-as-fitness, or principles of social bonding (Dissanayake, 2007). In the talk it is shown how specific features of visual art offer experiences that support the different explanations. For example, recently, Jakesch and Leder (2009, in press) have shown, that neither the mere quantity nor the number of matching information alone explained differences in appreciation of abstract art. Thus, it is discussed how the role of ambiguity in art, its visual basis, and the corresponding states in the beholder moderate art appreciation. Moreover, attributes of the situation and differences between beholders will also be discussed. Thus, considering the complex interplay of the situation, the beholder, with his past and presence, as well as the specific features of artworks, will uncover, why we really like art.